

Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 313

The Lord My Shepherd

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day evening, 5th June, 2011**

Text: *"The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want" (Psalm 23. 1).*

This must surely be one of the best-known verses in all the Bible, but I cannot remember whether I have ever heard a sermon preached on it. There do not seem to be many sermons preached on this verse. At home I have an interesting book. It goes almost verse by verse through the Bible and tells you all the sermons and all the passages and all the discourses of the divines over the years, but nothing on Psalm 23 verse 1. Perhaps people think it is too well known. In one sense, perhaps it is little known. But may the Holy Spirit sweetly lead us into it this evening. It is a beautiful subject. Christ the great Shepherd of the sheep, Christ the Son of God, Christ living, dying, rising again – He is described as the good Shepherd; He is described as the great Shepherd; He is described as the chief Shepherd. The wonderful thing is if you and I can say, He is *my* Shepherd.

"The Lord is my Shepherd." Now I do find that this is a most attractive subject to God's people. Almost all of them seem really to love it – Christ the Shepherd, His beloved people His sheep. I think I know the reason why. Because, beloved friends, if your religion is real, you will want the Lord Jesus to do everything for you that a shepherd does for his sheep. You will want Him to care for you, to watch over you, to guard you, to keep you, to lead you, to supply all your needs – all these things. You will want Him to do all this for you. Of course, the point will be this: you will be brought to feel that something of the nature of a sheep is yours. In what way? Well, your helplessness and your foolishness and your proneness to wander. "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way." So knowing our great need and our helplessness, our weakness, our sin, our foolishness, there seems such a beauty in our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ as the great Shepherd of the sheep.

But all the character offices and relationships of Christ are precious. I would commend them to our young people, especially to you young believers, those who have been taught the truth as it is in Jesus, not only to think as you did at the beginning. You felt your need as a sinner;

you wanted a Saviour; you found Him. But to be led on to think of all these beautiful offices and characters and relationships that our Lord Jesus bears. Well, you think of Him as a great and glorious High Priest. You think of Him as the Surety, or you think of Him as Zion's King, or He is a great Prophet. You think of a Mediator standing between. There are so many of these beautiful offices and characters and relationships. William Gadsby said when the Lord first blessed him, he used to read of these just as a point of interest, but later on he felt that as a sinner he had a special, peculiar need of the Lord Jesus in all these offices He sustains. They were all precious and vital, and so much beauty and so much suitability in them.

But His relationship to His people as their Shepherd. O there is such a beauty in it! "The Lord is my Shepherd." I wonder if any of those truths touched you as we read that great chapter, John chapter 10, this evening. "I am the good Shepherd: the good Shepherd giveth His life for the sheep." So much He loves them, so precious they are to Him. Rather than lose them He is willing to die for them. "I am the good Shepherd: the good Shepherd giveth His life for the sheep."

That was a beautiful word we read near the beginning of the chapter: "When He putteth forth His own sheep, He goeth before them, and the sheep follow Him." The Lord does put forth His sheep. Literally the shepherd did. He did not leave them just in one place where the pasture was. They had to move on. He put them forth, but he did not leave them. He went with them to lead them. Some of you are finding that the great Shepherd is putting you forth. He is putting some of you forth in a way of gracious exercise. He is putting some of you forth in a way you have never walked before. "Ye have not passed this way heretofore." And when the Lord puts you forth, He goes before you. Sometimes He puts His people forth to walk in a way of trouble, a way of difficulty. As we have it here, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death" – not just thinking of the last hour of our life, but those days of darkness and distress when it feels like the valley of the shadow of death to you. But when He puts you forth, He goes before you and even though you walk through the value of the shadow of death, "I will fear no evil: for Thou art with Me."

What about those beautiful verses as we came to the end of our reading: "My sheep hear My voice"? There is something very beautiful in that. "My sheep." They belong to Him. "My sheep." They are precious to Him. He says, They are Mine; Mine by eternal choice; Mine, loved with

an everlasting love; Mine by redemption. I bought them. I died for them. Mine as I seek them out and call them and bring them to the fold, and then Mine eternally because there will not be one sheep, one lamb missing from the fold.

“The Lord is my Shepherd.” Beautiful truth! I do not know whether you godly ones are discerning something which perhaps seems a strange comment at first, but in a sense there is a similarity between the subject this morning (Psalm 48. 12, 13) and the subject this evening. Perhaps you say, I cannot think of two subjects more different. Here you have a blessed relationship, a tender, loving relationship, the sheep and the Shepherd. But there you had it just the same this morning, the blessed inhabitants of Zion and the Lord’s presence and blessing, surrounded with the walls of salvation. In both cases it is the union of Christ and His church. But here, it is more the love and the tenderness and the care. “Casting all your care upon Him; for He careth for you.” And this morning it was more the relationship, the blessed safety, the blessed security of the people of God. But it is the same Saviour; it is the same salvation.

“The Lord is my Shepherd.” David knew it. We read what a good shepherd he was. He gave that account of the bear and the lion and how he delivered the sheep. And it stood him in good stead when he went to fight against Goliath. He was still only a boy, but he said, “The Lord that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, He will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine.” You say, David, you are only a boy, but you have some good divinity. You say, even Dr. Owen could not exceed him on that. What the Lord was to me then, He will be to me now. He did not fail me then; He will not fail me now. It is good divinity. “The Lord that delivered me ... He will deliver me.” May that be a point to some of you tonight. You look back. He did deliver you. O but you need Him tonight. “The Lord that delivered me ... He will deliver me.” Perhaps it is a more terrible trial the second time than the first, but it does not make any difference to God. David was a shepherd boy himself, so he knew how wonderful the care and the protection of a good shepherd and how the sheep need it. But he realised that that is exactly what his Saviour and God was for him. O that loving, watchful care, that divine protection, that safety, that gracious leading!

Well, he mentions a few beautiful things here. “He maketh me to lie down in green pastures.” That is rest. O that blessed rest for the sheep of Christ’s fold as He leads them forth. You know where it is: “The shadow of a great rock in a weary land.” That is where they find rest. That is where they lie down. And the sheep of Christ’s fold and the lambs in Christ’s fold are often weary. O but the loving Shepherd makes them to lie down. But those who actually have been shepherds say this is not a self-evident word. They say it is a hard thing to get a sheep to lie down. Only its own shepherd can make it lie down. If a sheep is sick or frightened it will not lie down. If there is danger about it will not lie down. I believe there are some of you in this congregation like that. It is hard work to make you lie down on the infinite merits and finished work of Jesus. The Pastor cannot do it with all his preaching and whatever he says to you. You need the great Shepherd Himself to come to you and *make* you lie down. And there you will find the gospel rest, and there you will know what that word means: “Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”

“He maketh me to lie down in green pastures.” One thing that marks the sheep is they are hungry. They say the sheep will not eat anything. So He makes them lie down in green pastures. I have always felt these green pastures signify the glorious gospel of the grace of God. The sheep lie down there and find a resting place there. It is not just they find a resting place there, but they find what we sang of just now:

“The sure provisions of my God
Attend me all my days.”

And the green pastures, the sheep have always been feeding there. They have never grown dry and they never will. If you are a sheep of Christ’s fold, you are satisfied with the green pastures of the gospel. A lot of people today are not satisfied with things, but a living soul is satisfied with Christ. He is not satisfied with himself; far from it. He is not satisfied with how much he knows of Christ, but he is satisfied with Christ and satisfied with the gospel. And the great Shepherd says, “My people shall be satisfied with My goodness.” “The Lord is my Shepherd.... He maketh me to lie down in green pastures.” Well, may a few of you tonight be made to lie down in the green pastures.

“He leadeth me.” That is the relationship between the shepherd and the sheep. It is a close one, a loving one, an intimate one. That is a

good religion: “He leadeth me.” Of course, we need to be led in providence, and we need to be led into the truth, led by the right way. “He leadeth me.” I have always loved that word in Isaiah 40: “He shall feed His flock like a shepherd: He shall gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young.” Just lingering here for a moment, if you read through Isaiah 40 where that word is found, it seems to be completely out of place. It does not seem to have anything to do with the chapter. You would think it should be in Psalm 23, or if not, in John 10, or if not in John 10, certainly in Ezekiel 34. But it is in Isaiah 40, and do you know what Isaiah 40 is? It is the great chapter in the Old Testament concerning the greatness of God, almighty, the Creator. He holds the mighty oceans in the hollow of His hand and He measures out the heavens with His span (verse 12). “He shall feed His flock like a shepherd.” Do you believe it? The little children’s hymn says, “Jesus, tender Shepherd, hear me.” O but this tender Shepherd is almighty.

“He shall feed His flock like a shepherd: He shall gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young.” That has been a very precious word to me over the years. In real religion, can anything really compare with the gentle leadings of our Lord and Saviour? “Those that are with young.” They carry a heavy burden; they are weary; they are easily tired; they cannot go on; they cannot keep up with the rest of the flock. Perhaps you feel like that. Perhaps bodily you are weary; perhaps spiritually you are not keeping up with the rest of the flock. What is He going to do? He is not going to beat you and drive you. He is going to *gently lead* you. I look back to those days, to know something of these gentle leadings of the great Shepherd of the sheep.

But here He is leading His flock beside the still waters. I think the margin says, “the waters of quietness.” That is a good word: “In quietness and in confidence shall be your strength.” We are not always quiet. Well, the Psalmist said, “Why art thou disquieted within me, O my soul?” But for the Shepherd to lead us away from everybody and everything and by these waters of quietness, the still waters, the waters of God’s everlasting love. They have their origin beneath the sacred throne of God. They bring peace and pardon and forgiveness and cleansing and salvation and every blessing. And we want the Lord in love and mercy to lead us there.

“The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: He leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul.” Sometimes we read that He restores comforts to Zion’s mourners. We need that. Sometimes we read that He restores the joy of our salvation. We need that. But we certainly need our soul restoring, because our soul is not healthy. O but the good Shepherd “restoreth my soul,” and “He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His name’s sake.” That is for the honour and glory of His name. Whatever is for your good, whatever is for the good of the sheep, is for the glory of the Shepherd.

These paths of righteousness. He will lead you away from the paths of wickedness, from the paths of carnality and sin, from the paths the world delights to walk in, from the paths you once walked in. “Go thy way forth by the footsteps of the flock.” He will lead you in the paths of righteousness and lead you to heaven. The sanctifying work of the Spirit, separation from the world, but above all, Christ’s own righteousness, that glorious righteousness which is our only hope, because God demands one from each one of us, and you and I have not got it. But there is a perfect righteousness, a blessed righteousness, the righteousness of Jesus which magnified the law and made it honourable. And the great Shepherd leads His poor sheep there in those paths of righteousness and there He bestows on them His own glorious righteousness. The Lord bless those of you this evening who in your soul’s feelings are saying, “Tell me, O Thou whom my soul loveth, where Thou feedest, where Thou makest Thy flock to rest at noon: for why should I be as one that turneth aside?” You cannot bear the thought of being left out.

“He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His name’s sake.” Well, beloved friends, these are just a few things, blessed things, that the Lord Jesus, the great Shepherd, does for His beloved sheep. But this is the point: “The Lord is *my* Shepherd.” Well, the Lord is the Shepherd of all His people, every one of them since Adam fell to the end of time. But O if only you and I can say, “*My* Shepherd.” “The Lord is *my* Shepherd.” How does the sinner come to know and say and believe that He is mine? Well, I know sometimes the Lord in wonderful mercy and divine sovereignty comes to one of the sheep of His fold and He says, “Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art Mine.” But that is not His usual way. The usual way in which the Lord Jesus makes Himself known as *your* Shepherd personally is as we have it in the

gospel. There is a sheep wandering far away on the mountains. It is lost. It does not know the way. It does not want to return. That is you; that is me. Well, don't we have

it in Ezekiel 34, wandering upon the dark mountains? Here is the sheep of Christ's fold. He has loved that sheep from all eternity. He died for that sheep. And now the time comes, and He goes forth and He finds that sheep, and that sheep follows Him and He brings it back to the fold. That is the usual way in which the Lord makes known that you are one of His sheep, when He claims you as His own.

“There is a period known to God
When all His sheep, redeemed by blood,
Shall leave the hateful ways of sin,
Turn to the fold, and enter in.”

“The Lord is my Shepherd.” The little story I have sometimes told you of the shepherd who had a flock and he had to sell them because of poverty. In the end, he had only two favourite sheep left and he had to sell them. Very shortly afterwards he received sufficient money to buy them back, so he went to the sheep market and paid the price for the two sheep, but he said, “I want my own, not any.” They said, “If you can find them, you can have them.” What did he do? He walked a little way from the sheep market and took his shepherd's pipe and began to play on it, and one sheep here and another there pressed through the crowd and went after him. That is it. They were his; he had paid the price. That is redemption. They were his own, and now he claimed them. He called them.

It was really this: “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.” That will mark you as a sheep of Christ's fold: you will follow Him. First of all by faith you will follow Him in His goings forth from everlasting, in the work of redemption, His life, death, resurrection and ascension. You will follow Him by faith and say, Here is all my hope of heaven; as a sinner I have no other. And then sweetly constrained by His love, you will be brought to follow Him out of the world in that narrow way which leads to heaven. You will go your way forth by the footsteps of the flock.

“The Lord is my Shepherd.” But the lambs can say, “The Lord is my Shepherd,” as much as the sheep. Take it literally. If you have a flock, some are lambs and some are sheep, but the shepherd is the lambs' shepherd as well as the sheep's shepherd. It is just a simple, self-evident

fact. They say that the sheep have the mark of whom they belong to on their back, and so they cannot read it. But the lambs often feel that they cannot be in the flock because they are not like the sheep. Well, the lambs are not like the sheep! A young person blessed with grace reads a book, a life of a godly man – I am not like that; reads an obituary – I am not like that; hears an aged saint speak – I am not like that. Well, you are not, but that does not mean you are not in the fold, not among the flock. O that question, What mean these bleatings of the lambs? Well, what do they mean? They mean that the Lord is your Shepherd. The bleatings of the lambs like this:

“Other refuge have I none,
Hangs my helpless soul on Thee”;

“God be merciful to me a sinner”; “Give me Christ, or else I die”;

“To the dear fountain of Thy blood,
Incarnate God, I fly.”

What mean these bleatings of the lambs? Well, they mean that these lambs have been born in Zion’s fold, born again. They mean that the Lord is their Shepherd. O may some of you this evening trace your calling and election sure.

“The Lord is my Shepherd.” It is made known by the Lord’s dealings, by His calling, as He deals with you as a Shepherd with His flock. But you young ones here this evening, you remember the oft-told story. There was a little boy learned this verse. He was told to count it on his fingers, five words, “The Lord is my Shepherd.” His mother said, “But that fourth word, that little word, it is very important. If you are ever able to say it – now don’t presume on it – but if you are ever through grace able to say it, you hold that finger, ‘The Lord is *my* Shepherd,’ and hold it tightly. ‘My Shepherd.’” Of course it is a long story. To be very brief, he was found dead in a drift after a snow storm, and his parents were so concerned about his soul’s welfare. It was such a comfort to them when his body was recovered and there this little boy had died holding firmly the fourth finger of his hand. Through grace he could say it: “The Lord is *my* Shepherd.” Well, may some of you have the witness of it this evening.

“The Lord is my Shepherd.” So here is something that flows from something else. It is “the Lord is my Shepherd,” and because He is, “I shall not want.” “The Lord is my Shepherd,” therefore, “I shall not want.”

It is like the first part being the foundation and the second part being the building on the foundation. If the Lord Jesus in love and mercy is your Shepherd, you will not want. Now I do want to emphasise this point, and I want to stop here, because I find that people, even older people and even godly people, do not altogether understand this point. We use the word *want* in two different ways. Some people say they want something, and it means they are longing for it; their desires are going out after it. But we can use the word *want* in a completely different way: to be *in* want. A person in poverty is *in* want. It is in that latter sense the word is used here: “I shall not want.” It does not mean you will not want anything, long for anything; of course you will. You will still want His mercy, His salvation. But it means He will not leave you to be *in* want. A well-known person in our denomination said to me on one occasion that he thought that verse is terrible which is often sung at chapel teas:

“In Paradise, within the gates,
A nobler entertainment waits,
Fruits new and old laid up in store,
Where we shall feast, *and want no more.*”

He said that is awful. We shall always be wanting more – wanting more of the Saviour’s presence, wanting more of the Saviour’s love. We should not be allowed to sing it. “We shall feast, and want no more”? Of course, the dear man had completely misunderstood the meaning of the word. There we shall feast and never be in want, in spiritual poverty.

I did feel I wanted to emphasise this point. It seems plain and simple, but I have come across godly people and older people who have been puzzled by it. “The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want.” I think I could almost preach another sermon on this, but I am not going to. But if the Lord is my Shepherd, I shall never want help in time of need. It will never be lacking; it will never be wanting. I shall never want that gracious upholding; the Lord will never fail to give it. “The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want” comfort. The Lord will not fail to comfort me. And forgiveness. O how we need it, but if the Lord is my Shepherd, then He most certainly will forgive me. What of the supply of all our needs, great and small, providence and grace? “The Lord is my Shepherd.” Then every need shall richly be supplied. I shall not be in want because the Lord will supply my needs. What about strength equal to the day? That will not be missing; that will not be wanting. It is a big subject, and I suppose we

could linger a long time on each of these points, and there are many more of them. When you go home, you think of some of them. I shall not want heaven at last.

“The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want.” Just two Scriptures in closing. One is this: “They that seek the Lord shall not want *any good thing*.” That is very full; that is very comprehensive. If we seek the Lord, and the sheep of Christ’s fold do, if we seek the Lord and fear His name we are among the sheep, among the lambs and we shall not want any good thing. That is, the Lord will never withhold from us as the great Shepherd anything which is for our real good.

“The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want.” And the second is a most unfamiliar word, but it is a word that in his Bethel days was special to our old friend Mr. Joseph Rutt. It comes in a very strange place. It comes in one of the most terrible chapters in the Bible, Judges chapter 19. If you read the goings on there, they are an absolute disgrace, absolutely scandalous. In the midst of that, there was an old man, and a wayfaring man passing by, and the old man invited him in. The wayfaring man had many needs. He was poor. And the old man said to him, “Howsoever let all thy wants lie upon me.” I remember to Mr. Rutt it was special in a spiritual sense, in a gospel sense. All the things you are in need of, every one, the old man said, You cannot supply it; you have not got it; but I have, and I will do it for you. I will supply it for you. “Let all thy wants lie upon me.”

Well, may we see it with the great Shepherd of the Sheep, our good and gracious God. Where are you this evening, beloved friends? What about all these things, spiritual, providential, great and small? “Howsoever let all thy wants” – all of them – “lie upon Me.”

“The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want.”